

# Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

## Protecting Civilians in War: The Fourth Geneva Convention

- Standard: I. Culture  
II. Time, Continuity, and Change  
III. People, Places, and Environments  
IV. Individual Development and Identity  
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions  
VI. Power, Authority, and Governance  
VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption  
VIII. Science, Technology, and Society  
IX. Global Connections  
X. Civic Ideals and Practices
- Grade Level: 9–12
- Objectives: The student will:
- Determine the basic tenets of the Fourth Geneva Convention
  - Apply the articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention to conflicts past and present
  - Discuss the realities faced by civilians during war
- Time: 1-2 class periods
- Materials: Documents: **1949** *Excerpts from the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians in War*
- Resources: *Images: Warsaw 1939*
- Exercises: *An Analysis of Civilians in Conflict* (individual hand outs, Groups A-F)
- Procedures:

### *Setting the Stage*

The Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians in War was one of the four adopted in August 1949. It is commonly referred to as the "Fourth Geneva Convention."

This Convention defines humanitarian protections for civilians in a war zone. "Civilians" include hostages, diplomats, spies, bystanders, and the general public in territory under military occupation. The convention outlaws torture, collective punishment, and the resettlement by an occupying power of its own civilians on territory under its military control. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth\\_Geneva\\_Convention](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_Geneva_Convention)

A **civilian** is any person not belonging to the armed forces.

A **protected person** refers to anyone who is within an area in conflict or occupation  
**High Contracting Parties** are countries who signed the Fourth Geneva Convention.

**1.** Show students the resource, Image: *Solider and Refugees in Warsaw, 1939*, without the title.

**2.** Ask the students to describe what they see and identify/speculate where and when the photo was taken. What conflict is represented? Has it been resolved?

**3.** Reveal the title of the photo and discuss the implications involved in the story of the people in it. This site:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Warsaw\\_1939\\_refugees\\_and\\_soldier.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Warsaw_1939_refugees_and_soldier.jpg)

reveals only this information about the photo: "A Polish family huddles around a column in front of the Opera House in besieged Warsaw while a Polish soldier looks on."

**4.** Explain that since the Fourth Geneva Convention was signed in 1949 it followed the many inhumane acts of World War II, lending even more relevancy to the photo.

**5.** Arrange students in groups of 4-5 students.

**6.** Distribute copies of the document, *Excerpts from the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians in War*.

**7.** Assign each group **ONE** of the photos included in the exercise, *An Analysis of Civilians in Conflict* (Groups A-F).

**8.** Allow time for students to conduct their research in the computer lab or with computers in the classroom.

**9.** Have each group briefly describe their assigned conflict. As they report, project the group's photo for everyone to view.

**10.** Discuss:

- a.** What are the commonalities and differences in the conflicts? (List them on board as the answers are given.)
- b.** Which of them are unresolved? Discuss why this is the case.
- c.** Why might some of these conflicts be unknown to some students?
- d.** Do the photos show compliance or noncompliance with the Fourth Geneva Convention? Perhaps this cannot be determined JUST from one photo, but does research support one or the other?
- e.** Do certain articles of the Convention appear more than once in the students' research. Discuss the implications of this repetition.
- f.** Evaluate the effectiveness of the Fourth Geneva Convention. ■